

Chairwoman Cafferro, members of the committee, my name is Shannon McDonald, I'm acting Economic Security Services Branch Manager and Deputy Director for the Department of Public Health and Human Services. Part of my responsibilities include overseeing the Child and Family Services Division.

I appreciate this opportunity to update the Committee on Child and Family Services Division's activities and relevant data that might help you understand what is being done to protect children and serve families.

Before I talk to you about our practice model and service array, I'd like to report on the data requested by the committee:

- First, as of August, the number of children in the state in foster care is 3822, compared to 3610 at the same time last year.
- The number of reports to Central Intake of suspected abuse and neglect year to date is 13,343, resulting in 6,854 CPS investigations. In addition to calls that get screened for investigation, Central Intake also gets requests for information and services.
- The number of children removed from their homes in the last quarter of the fiscal year – April – June was 774.
- This calendar year so far, there have been 8 notifications of fatalities to the office of child and family ombudsman under Section 41-3-209(1). This statute requires reporting specific set of circumstances, including:
 - A child who had been the subject of a report or investigation of abuse or neglect
 - Was in out-of-home care at the time of the child's death – that number was zero, OR

- Was under a voluntary protective services agreement

Please keep in mind that these reports do not necessarily mean that the child died as a result of abuse or neglect, and in some circumstances, the report comes into central intake as a report after the fatality has already occurred.

Substance Use

As you know, for years, one of the factors with the biggest impact on abuse and neglect numbers is substance use. As of July of this year, 66.5% of open placements involved drugs. By far, the highest percentage involved methamphetamine, followed by much smaller numbers in marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drugs.

In an effort to remediate this enormous problem, we are working on a number of strategies both within the child and family services division and with other partners.

- The Department has been working with the Attorney General's office and many other partners to reduce prescription drug abuse.
- Within the department we are working on a collaborative to gather data from all areas that might help us understand the underlying causes of drug abuse and how prevent it.
- We continue to explore implementing a Mutual Home Model for substance using parents as a strategy to keep children and parents together as opposed to placement in foster care. Mutual Homes are supported, supervised, sober living situations for parents and their young children. A pilot home is in the planning stages in Fort Peck. We hope to use what we learned in that effort to expand Mutual Homes across all 6 regions of Montana.

Once fully implemented, we believe we can defer approximately 75 children a year from foster care and keep them home with a parent.

- Addiction Recovery Teams (ART) are another strategy we are planning with the Addiction and Mental Health Division. ART Teams are a team of staff who are focused on early and rapid assessment and treatment access for substance using parents in child welfare.

Workforce Development

Within the department, we continue to struggle with maintaining a strong workforce. As you know, working in child welfare is an extremely difficult and often underappreciated job. Because of this, it is difficult to recruit and retain employees. In some areas, the turnover data is encouraging, and in some places it has gone up. I'll give you some 2017 numbers for some of the front line workers

- Central Intake Specialists have had 50% turnover, which is up from last year's number of 29%
- Central intake supervisors have had 20% turnover, which is consistent with last year's number.
- Child Protection Specialist turnover is at 35%, down from 43% last year.
- The Child protection Specialist supervisor turnover rate is down to just under 4%, which is down from last year's number, which was 12%.

In an effort to attract new workers and support the workforce that we have, we are working on a number of projects:

- We are working with the University of Montana, School of Social Work – which is a long-time partner – to improve educational opportunities to current workers as well as develop a future workforce to support the child welfare system throughout the state.
- The University will also continue its training, support, and coaching to current staff, and we have discussed expanding the resources available to foster families, birth families, and even employees in other parts of the department so that we can positively impact the child welfare system.
- Casey Family Programs is sponsoring a two-day training for our supervisors, in an effort to build their capacity so they can coach the work with their caseworkers. The training will include an expert in the safety model and a drug and alcohol expert to build understanding in safety planning and working with substance using parents.

Service Array

Our service array is also continuously being evaluated to ensure fiscal responsibility

- We continue to evaluate worker caseloads in an effort to best deploy staff to the areas of the state where help is most needed.
- We are partnering with the legislature and the PEW foundation in their results first initiative, in order to gain an understanding of

how best to allocate the money that we have in evidence based programs.

- We are also working within the department to leverage resources from other areas to support the children and families that are part of this system, such as using public health data and resources to target families before they get to a level of crisis that involves CPS. As noted above, we are also looking at resources within AMDD
- Internally, we are evaluating our budget to ensure that we are practicing good financial stewardship. We are working with a contractor to help us better claim IV-E funding. We are also evaluating our contracts to ensure that our needs are being met and our contractors are providing the best value possible with the limited funding that we have.

For several years now, there has been an effort on the part of the department, the legislature, and many other partners to improve our child welfare system. Please be assured that this department is fully committed to making the best decisions for the children and families that they serve.

If you have any further questions I'm available, along with Director Hogan.